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THE PRENUPTIAL RITE IN THE *AETIA* OF CALLIMACHUS

BY CAMPBELL BONNER

In an interesting paper published in the last number of this journal (pp. 302 ff.), Professor Duane Reed Stuart has proposed to interpret the ceremony described in the *Aetia* 1-3 by means of the marriage customs of other peoples than the Greek. With Housman and Puech, he rightly retains ἄρσενι, and understands κούρω to mean a boy of tender years.¹ He then adduces from the folk-lore of India and of various European peoples a number of marriage-customs in which a male child is in some way or other brought into contact with the bride; it is handed to her, kissed by her, or held upon her lap at some point in the wedding festivities (pp. 307 f.). In one case, cited from Lloyd's *Peasant Life in Sweden*, "custom prescribed that on the night preceding the wedding the prospective bride should sleep with a boy baby. If she did so, her firstborn would be a son."

The common principle involved in these marriage customs is that of sympathetic magic, which is well known in Hellenic folk-lore; and their object is to insure the fertility of the union, and especially the birth of male children. Hence Mr. Stuart concludes that the Naxian rite performed at Cydippe's wedding "took its rise in the desire to render the forthcoming marriage fruitful, and to enable the bride to become the mother of sons, 'the pillars of the house.' Simulation was the means by which the end wished for was to be attained."

This article has rendered no small service in showing the possibility of interpreting the obscure Naxian ceremony by anthropological methods. But I believe that Mr. Stuart's theory is wrong, notwithstanding its general plausibility, and in spite even of the extraordinary neatness with which the Swedish custom just mentioned fits into it and seems to support it. At any rate my own reading in the field of primitive custom has led me to take another view of it.

¹ Since the body of this paper was put into type, I have seen K. F. W. Schmidt's discussion of the *Aetia* in *Gött. Gel. Anzeigen* for July, 1911, pp. 449 f. Schmidt interprets the παῖς ἀμφιθαλής as Eros, citing Ar. *Birds* 1737. This does not seem possible. Von Arnim's treatment of the *Aetia* in *Sitzungsber. d. Wiener Akad.*, 1910, is not yet accessible to me.

That view I will state as briefly as possible, then consider some doubtful points in Mr. Stuart's explanation, and, finally, offer in such detail as seems necessary, the evidence upon which I propose another interpretation of the rite in question.

The Naxian custom which directed that on the night before her marriage the bride should sleep with a young boy, or possibly a mere infant of male sex, is a rite of precautionary character, probably designed, in its beginnings, to protect the bridegroom against an evil influence to which he might else be liable. It is possible to hold different views as to the exact character of this evil influence, and its source. But it seems most probable that the ceremony, involving, as it does, the substitution of another male person in the place of the real bridegroom, is a harmless survival from the barbarous custom of ceremonial defloration of the bride by another than her future husband—a custom which has been widely practiced among savage peoples.¹ In the Naxian custom, the important point is not merely the contact of the boy with the bride, but their *συγκοίμησις*—a mimicry, probably a survival, of prenuptial commerce with another than the husband to be. We have learned not to shrink from the discovery of crude relics of savage *mores* among the customs of the Greeks; and while such an observance as this may have no perfect analogue in Hellenic usage, it is certainly not more isolated than it remains if viewed merely as a charm to obtain male offspring.

In three important points the theory of Mr. Stuart seems to fit the facts less accurately than that which I have just offered. These difficulties, it will be seen, have not all been overlooked by Mr. Stuart himself, who has throughout conducted his investigation with admirable candor.

In the first place, among the illustrations cited by Mr. Stuart, there is only one custom which prescribes that the bride shall sleep with the child—the Swedish instance given on the authority of Lloyd. The sleeping together is therefore not an essential feature of these magical methods of obtaining male children; for it is quite

¹ The resemblance of the Naxian marriage-rite to primitive customs that involve ceremonial defloration had been observed independently by my friend Professor George L. Hamilton of Cornell University, recently of the University of Michigan, with whom I discussed the substance of this paper. He has kindly called my attention to several important articles, notably Hertz's "Die Sage vom Giftmädchen."

unsafe, as Stuart recognizes (p. 309), to assume that the Swedes of the nineteenth century have faithfully preserved in its original frankness a custom which was modified in the direction of delicacy by the Slavs and the Hindus, whose folk-lore is, to say the least, not prudish. On the other hand, the explanation which I suggest has the advantage of taking this feature as the central point of the Naxian rite.

Secondly, the relation of the custom to the *αἴτιον* is far from satisfactory if Stuart's view is accepted as the right one. Nobody who has attentively studied the relation of custom and myth can seriously maintain that the observance was really intended to commemorate an incident in the life of the immortals; Stuart's condemnation of such errors is as just as it is emphatic. Yet one may reasonably expect a certain pointed appropriateness in the fitting of a myth to a curious custom. What, after all, is the story of Hera which Callimachus will not tell? Not, I think, the stolen amour with Zeus in Samos, which story has its proper correlative in the Samian trial marriage (cf. Nilsson *Griechische Feste* 40, 47); and I agree with Stuart (p. 310) in thinking that that institution should be distinguished from the Naxian ceremony, at least in the present state of our knowledge. But another point is to be considered. In the *Musée Belge* XV, 55 f., M. Paul Graindor rightly observes that Callimachus' reason for interrupting himself is quite inadequate, if he is alluding to the secret loves of Zeus and Hera from which Homer had long since lifted the veil of mystery (*Iliad* xiv. 296). M. Graindor is inclined to think that Callimachus is simply advertising his learning by the device of feigning reluctance to display it inopportunistically. This seems to me a last resort. On the other hand, I attach more importance to his alternative suggestion that there may be an allusion to the obscure relations of Hera and Heracles. The indications of an amorous relation between Hera and the great hero, to whom most legends represent her as bitterly hostile, have been worked out (after Tümpel and Miss Harrison) most fully by A. B. Cook in *Classical Review* (1906) 365 ff., 416 ff., and the theory has been recently accepted by Jules Prickartz (*Musée Belge* XIV, 315, 327). I am not prepared to indorse all the views of these scholars with regard to the puzzling relations of the goddess and the hero, and I am particularly skeptical

as to the "matriarchal" aspect of Hera. However, it seems to me that an ancient amour of Hera and Heracles may be fairly derived from the evidence. "Cette hypothèse," remarks M. Graindor, "expliquerait mieux la réticence de Callimaque, et surtout le rapprochement du cas d'Héra avec la coutume Naxienne." The correspondence of *αἵτιον* and custom would be complete if, against a story that Heracles was the earlier mate of Hera, we place a ceremony which simulated the prenuptial intercourse of a bride with another than her future husband.

My third objection to interpreting the Naxian rite in the light of sympathetic magic has to do with the passage in Pollux (iii. 39-40) which Puech first cited in connection with the ceremony at Cydippe's wedding. The sentences in question are as follows: *ἀπανλία . . . ἐν ᾗ ὁ νυμφίος εἰς τοῦ πενθεροῦ ἀπανλίζεται ἀπὸ τῆς νύμφης*. And further: *καὶ τῷ μὲν νυμφίῳ τότε ἐν τοῦ πενθεροῦ παιδίον ἀμφιθαλὲς θήλυ συγκατακλίνεται, τῇ δὲ νύμφῃ ἐν τοῦ γαμβροῦ ἄρρεν*. In treating this passage Mr. Stuart (pp. 305 f., 311 ff.) rightly insists upon the distinction between *ἀπανλία* and *ἐπανλία*, and holds that the *ἀπανλία* refers to a prenuptial ceremony. Furthermore, he recognizes (pp. 311 f.) that the part played by the bridegroom in the notice in Pollux is not easily brought into agreement with his interpretation of the Naxian rite. For, as he truly observes, "when simulation is resorted to as a prophylactic or a remedial measure against sterility, it is the woman on whom the magic influence is centered." I may add that the pairing of the bridegroom with a female child speaks emphatically against the interpretation of the Naxian rite as a magical means of obtaining male offspring. Here Mr. Stuart is "inclined to think that the lexicographer's account simply incorporates a tradition of the Naxian custom with various embellishments as to details, the source of which it is impossible to fix." But, on critical grounds, such a treatment of the passage should be adopted only when all other expedients fail.

The theory which I have proposed above can be more easily brought into harmony with the statements of Pollux. As he describes the *ἀπανλία*, I should be disposed to interpret it as follows: In order to avoid certain dangers which threaten them, especially at the time of first sexual contact, both bride and bridegroom go through a sort of

proxy wedding, each with a child of the opposite sex. These children are immature, hence harmless; and being ἀμφιθαλείς, their presence betokens long life and general good fortune for the bridal pair (cf. Frazer *Adonis*², p. 423). It is quite true that the danger, in so far as it is connected with conjugal intercourse, usually directs itself against the man, a circumstance which has been referred to physiological causes (Crawley *The Mystic Rose* 188-91, 307, 347; Reinach *Mythes, Cultes, et Religions* I, 88, 115; cf. Hertz "Die Sage vom Giftmädchen," p. 212 [in *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* 156-277]). But we shall see presently that vague dangers are sometimes imagined to hang over both parties, who therefore make use of proxies to evade them. And besides, the notion that the marital approaches of some men may be dangerous seems to be attested among the Greeks by certain curious legends about Minos (Anton. Lib. 41, § 4 f.; Apollod. *Bibl.* iii. § 197 f. Wagner).

Such, then, are the reasons why another explanation seems preferable to Mr. Stuart's. It is now necessary to discuss the alternative theory somewhat more fully, and set forth the grounds upon which superstitions such as would give rise to the Naxian rite may be assumed to have existed among the Greeks in remote times. It should be stated in advance that we are not to suppose that the Greeks, at the time when we know them, were obsessed by such ideas of "sexual danger" as are to be discovered among savage tribes; and the custom of ceremonial defloration would undoubtedly have seemed barbarous to them. Of the Naxians the most that can be said is, that they thought it luckier that the bride should pass the night before her marriage with a young boy; and perhaps they added "as Hera had shared her couch with Heracles before she became the wife of Zeus."

A few scattered passages may perhaps be used to show that the idea of peril from the contact of the sexes was not unknown to the Greeks. Thus Artemidorus in his *Dream-Book* (ii. 65) says γαμῆν παρθένον τῷ νοσοῦντι θάνατον σημαίνει· ὅσα γὰρ τῷ γαμοῦντι συμβαίνει, τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ τῷ ἀποθανόντι. Of course we are not obliged to accept the reason he assigns. One may also refer to Pindar's allusion to the death of Hymenaeus at his marriage. But this mutilated fragment (139) can hardly be used as evidence.

Crawley thinks that the stealthy manner in which the Spartans visited their wives under cover of night was prompted by a desire to lessen a possible danger (*The Mystic Rose*, p. 328; Plut. *Lyc.* xv. 4-6).

But on the whole, we are forced to look abroad for evidence. The material illustrating the superstition in question is best collected in the treatise of Hertz which has been already cited (195 ff.); see also Frazer *Adonis*², p. 52, n. 2. Hertz has shown that the fear of danger from the woman led to various practices of having her deflowered by another than her husband; but he is careful not to assign this fear as the actuating motive in all cases. This same superstitious awe is given an important place in Crawley's *The Mystic Rose* (chaps. viii, ix, xiv, especially pp. 320-49).

Indications of this superstition among the more civilized peoples of Western Asia, who came into contact with the Greeks, are not free from ambiguity. Traces of it have been found in certain customs which required a surrender of virginity to a stranger in connection with religious observances, as in the Babylonian rite in the temple of Mylitta (Herod. i. 199), at Heliopolis in Syria, in Armenia, and apparently in Cyprus (cf. Nilsson *op. cit.* 365 f.). But the authorities are not entirely clear about certain critical points, and these customs may have been confused with continued religious prostitution at temples, which is probably of different origin. In consequence, these strange rites have been the subject of a vigorous controversy, into which space does not permit, nor does the occasion justify, our entering. Those who are curious about the origin and development of the customs in question must be referred to the investigations of professed students of anthropology. In addition to the works of Hertz and Crawley, the following discussions are of special importance: Farnell in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* VII, 74, 86-88; Nilsson *op. cit.* 365 ff., Frazer *Adonis*² 32 ff., 50 ff., Hartland "Concerning the Rite at the Temple of Mylitta," in *Anthropological Essays Presented to E. B. Tylor* 189-202.¹

I must content myself with adopting the view conveniently stated by Farnell (*op. cit.*, p. 88): "The explanation that fits the facts far

¹ Gruppe's remarks (*Griech. Mythol. und Religionsgesch.*, p. 916) about the origin of the sacrifice of virginity are not convincing.

better is that we are here [referring to the Babylonian and similar rites] dealing with a special modification of a widespread custom, the custom of destroying virginity before marriage so that the bridegroom's intercourse should be safe from a peril that is much dreaded by men in a certain state of culture; and here as in other ritual it is the stranger that takes the peril upon himself." This view is accepted by Nilsson (*loc. cit.*) and Cumont (*Les religions orientales dans le paganisme Romain* 286 ff.), and more recently by Samter (*Geburt, Hochzeit, und Tod* 113) and Fehrle (*Die kultische Keuschheit im Altertum* 41). Hartland (p. 201) finds the theory of the danger of sexual contact questionable, and treats ceremonial defloration as a puberty rite, a formal introduction into sexual life. This, however, does not account so well for the delegation of the act to a stranger. Frazer's two most valid objections, namely the religious connections of the custom, and the payment of money by the stranger, are met by Hartland (pp. 195 and 198) and Nilsson (p. 367).

Assuming, now, that a superstition which had its outcome in ritual defloration existed among peoples in close touch with the Greeks, we may find a softened form of the savage custom in the Cretan observance of first putting the bride to bed beside an image (Anton. Lib. 17. 6).¹ Nilsson (p. 367, n. 2) calls attention to the use of a phallic symbol in Roman marriages. It is another form of softening the ancient and barbarous custom when, as in Naxos, the bride sleeps with a male child.

One word more regarding the account of the ἀπαυλία in Pollux, according to whom in some part of Greece, we know not where, the bridegroom, on the occasion of the ἀπαυλία, slept with a female child. The theory which I have adopted in explaining the Naxian rite lays special stress upon the danger apprehended from the bride, so there remains a difficulty in explaining the bridegroom's part in the notice of Pollux. One might perhaps argue that it is a double precaution—while the boy is supposed to remove the danger that attaches to the bride, the bridegroom by intimate proximity to an

¹ Simulated intercourse with a god may reasonably be interpreted as a magic rite with fertility as its object. So Dümmler *Philol.* LVI, 22–32, Gruppe *op. cit.*, p. 856, n. 3, Fehrle *op. cit.*, p. 10. Nor is it impossible that a human being might be imagined to represent the god. But as Fehrle saw (p. 10, n. 4, p. 41), when the rite involves or implies devirgination, the explanation is probably different.

immature, and so harmless, girl, is rendered less vulnerable to the influence proceeding from the mature woman. Crawley, however, contends that sexual danger affects both parties, and instances the Hindu ceremony by which both bride and groom are previously married to inanimate objects, especially trees (*op. cit.* 340 f.). An interesting account of these tree-marriages is given by Crooke in his *Popular Religion and Folk-Lore of Northern India* II, pp. 115–21. In some of them Crooke recognizes a fertility charm, the couple taking to themselves the vigor and fecundity of the tree. In others there is clearly indicated an effort to transfer to the tree an evil influence—bad luck, the evil eye, etc.—especially when it is said that the tree dies after the marriage (Crooke II, 120 f., and so Frazer *Golden Bough*³ II, 57, n. 4). The double proxy in the rite described by Pollux might thus be explained as a substitution for the real parties, who are especially liable to evil influences, of children who, being ἀμφιθαλεῖς and lucky, are able to bid defiance to demonic terrors. Certainly the common custom of substituting some disguised person for the bride, or (less commonly) for the bridegroom is rightly regarded as a means of misleading demons or ill-disposed people who might cast a malignant influence upon the real bridal pair. See Crooke *op. cit.* II, 6–8; Reinach *Mythes, Cultes, et Religions* I, 117; Samter *op. cit.* 98–108, especially 105 f. and 218. But the simulated cohabitation which is indicated by the Pollux passage does not appear, I believe, in any of the “false bride” customs, and the analogy of the tree-marriage is imperfect here. Hence Crawley’s idea that both parties are dangerous to each other seems best to explain the Greek ceremony.